

Composition- my approach

SJW 2012 Special, rev 2017

Give the students some insight in to why and how I compose and try to inspire them to write and also give them some approaches to help make it more fun or productive.

Why I write-

- it's an amazing feeling to play your own music
- it's an extension of the improvisational process
- All improvisors should try composing- they feed each other
- it creates new structures for improvisation, ones that are different than standards
- I approach improvising on a song by analyzing the structural elements of it, then use those for improv. Composing gives me a chance to create the structural elements which I know will make for fruitful improv (sometimes...)
- keeps me in the music on a day when I can't get to the piano- a way to practice ear training
- most often it's not about a specific person, place or thing- it's just beauty for it's own sake
- sometimes it is inspired by a particular event or feeling- [Dark Day] [Homecoming] [NoCoHo] [Endgame]
- sometimes it's inspired by and another piece of music [Astana Uncompromised] [Moody Poodles and Mooses]

How I write-

'Write it now, decide if it's good later.' Don't edit yourself while you're writing or nothing will ever get written.

- **Trying to be more intuitive, to to preserve the connection between composition and improvisation.**
- **Away from the piano-** on a plane, then get home and play, edit and rework (or discard) a piece.
- Stream of consciousness- start with an idea, then follow it through, then vary the material, like in a solo. [Follow the Thread] [Suspicious Fishes and Quiches]
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- Focus on simple melody [Burnt Orange] [Haze and Light] or [Perigee]- influence of pop songs on my jazz writing. importance of singing melody to get power from range
- or focus on Harmony [Once Astray] [Perigee]
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- **I try to stay away from hard music that's just hard to be cool.** If something is irregular then it should make sense to the ear. People often say that my music looks hard when they see the chart, but makes sense and is playable once they've got it in their ear. [Invisible Horizon] [Fantasy] [Harmonia Mundi] [Back and Forth]
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- Vamp Based [Oaktown Morning Blues]
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- **At the piano**- improvise freely until an idea comes along, then develop [The Wild Kitties]
- let the fingers do the writing [Homecoming] [Fantasy] [Tema para Yosvany]
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- Importance of balance of developing, then varying the material. Write in the variations: learned from Bevan Manson [Bash into Spring]
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- Writing for a particular project/band- Latin, funk, free, acoustic
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- Harmonic freedom- [Playground]
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- Improvisation- the tune often mandates a specific approach to improvisation, either based on it's form or on a variation or simplification of it's form. [Harmonia Mundi] [Homecoming] Take elements from the song and simplify them to make improv more fun and easy
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- Sometimes my tunes have a little "trick" in them that makes the simple a little more interesting. [Five's Ferry] [Oaktown]
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- Extended forms- long codas that introduce new material after main head [Homecoming] [Gratitude]
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- writing with help of sequencer or DAW [The Unabonger]
- writing as digital sound collage- Organic! concept of improvisation, then edit, cut and restructure into a new form, then overdub or write on the top of that [Squakzilla]
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- Assignment or idea based writing- "write a very quiet song" or "write something with tempo changes" or "write a series of stops"
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- The richness of the Blues [Moody Poodles] [Invisible Horizon] [Harmonia Mundi solos]
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- Contrafact: Classic idea of a new melody on standard changes [Delutois] [Into Somewhere]